

Sunday 12th January 2020

The Baptism of Christ

The First Sunday of Epiphany

White



Collect

Eternal Father, who at the baptism of Jesus revealed him to be your Son, anointing him with the Holy Spirit: grant to us, who are born again by water and the Spirit, that we may be faithful to our calling as your adopted children; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

Isaiah 42:1-9 English Standard Version (ESV)

The LORD's Chosen Servant

42¹ Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations. ²He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; ³a bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. ⁴He will not grow faint or be discouraged^[a] till he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his law. ⁵Thus says God, the LORD, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people on it and spirit to those who walk in it: ⁶“I am the LORD; I have called you^[b] in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations, ⁷to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness. ⁸I am the LORD; that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to carved idols. ⁹Behold, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare; before they spring forth I tell you of them.”

Footnotes: a. or bruised. b. the Hebrew for *you* is singular; four times in this verse.

COMMENT: This is one of four poetic passages in the Book of Isaiah referred to as “The Servant Songs.” They describe Israel’s mission as God’s servant people to bring “light to the nations.” Though composed by an unknown prophet during Israel’s exile in Babylon (586-539 BC) who has been named by scholars as Deutero-Isaiah (or Second Isaiah), the apostolic church appears to have regarded these poems as prophecies of Jesus, the Messiah/Christ. Arguments have persisted as to who the servant actually was – an individual or the nation of Israel as a whole. It would seem that while verse 1-4 appear to identify an individual, verse 5-9 seem to refer to the nation as God’s representative. Generally speaking, the nation has been incorporated in an individual in the same way that a monarch incorporates a people – e.g. in the law courts using English Common Law, “the Queen vs. Smith and Company.” Some biblical scholars have suggested that Jesus himself adopted these songs as the model for his ministry which began with his baptism by John. The authors of the four Gospels nowhere cite Jesus himself quoting from these songs. There is little doubt, however, that they had these passages in mind as they told the story of his ministry and passion. (Matthew 26:24, 54, 56; Mark 9:12; Luke 18:31, 24:25-27, 46) He alone fulfilled all the qualities ascribed to the Servant. His character completely exemplified the gentleness, righteousness and justice described in this passage, moral qualities which to this poet/prophet come directly from Yahweh. The role of the Servant is clearly defined as creating a new covenant that will bring this knowledge of Israel’s moral monotheism to other nations. At the beginning of the Christian era, some Jews thought of the Servant as the Israel’s Messiah, but surprisingly Christian interpreters dissented from this view until the end of the 18th Century.

Matthew 3:13-17 English Standard Version (ESV)

The Baptism of Jesus

3¹³ Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. ¹⁴ John would have prevented him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” ¹⁵ But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfil all righteousness.” Then he consented. ¹⁶ And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him,^[a] and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; ¹⁷ and behold, a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son,^[b] with whom I am well pleased.”

Footnotes: a. some manuscripts omit *to him*. b. or *my Son, my (or the) Beloved*.

COMMENT: This simple story of Jesus' baptism reveals the humility Jesus. He identified with sinners. In Matthew's version of the baptism, only Jesus saw the Spirit descend as a dove and heard God's voice. This follows Mark's narrative, but both Luke and John give a different view of the experience. Luke told of it as an impartial observer of the incident would do, probably because the matter did not seem important to him or he had no independent tradition on which to base this detail. (Luke 3:21-23). John, however, stated specifically that it was John the Baptist who saw "the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove" and for him this was the sign that Jesus was the Son of God to whom he was to bear witness (John 1:32-34). Of course, such a distinct presentation of the same incident served the specific purposes of the different authors. While Matthew did not refer to the Old Testament passages, the concept contained in the words, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased," are undoubtedly a combination of phrases from Psalm 2:7 and Isaiah 42:1. Matthew intended them to be interpreted as confirmation of Jesus' messianic role. In this passage the baptism by John was the point in his life when Jesus recognized his true vocation.

Psalm 29 *Afferte Domino* Grail Psalter

℟ The Lord will bless his people with peace.

¹ O give the Lord, you sons of God,
give the Lord glory and power;
² give the Lord the glory of his name.
Adore the Lord in his holy court. **℟**

³ The Lord's voice resounding on the waters,
the Lord on the immensity of waters;
⁴ the voice of the Lord, full of power,
the voice of the Lord, full of splendour. **℟**

⁵ The Lord's voice shattering the cedars,
the Lord shatters the cedars of Lebanon;
⁶ he makes Lebanon leap like a calf
and Sirion like a young wild ox. **℟**

⁷ (The Lord's voice flashes flames of fire.)
⁸ The Lord's voice shaking the wilderness,
the Lord shakes the wilderness of Kadesh;
⁹ the Lord's voice rending the oak tree
and stripping the forest bare. **℟**

^{3b} The God of glory thunders.

¹⁰ In his temple they all cry: “Glory!”

The Lord sat enthroned over the flood;
the Lord sits as king for ever.

✠ The Lord will bless his people with peace.

¹¹ The Lord will give strength to his people,
the Lord will bless his people with peace. **✠**

**Glory be to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit,
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be,
world without end. Amen.**

COMMENT: In descriptive metaphors the psalmist ‘sees’ and ‘hears’ God during a fierce thunderstorm while worshipping in the temple. This causes the worshipers to praise the glory of God, envisioned as a monarch on a throne giving peace to his subjects.

Short Preface

And now we give you thanks through Jesus Christ our Lord, whose willing submission to the way of righteousness is the pattern of our calling to be his people and live in his way.

Post Communion

Lord of all time and eternity, you opened the heavens and revealed yourself as Father in the baptism of Jesus your beloved Son: by the power of your Spirit complete the heavenly work of our rebirth through the waters of the new creation; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

Blessing

May God, who in Christ gives us a spring of water welling up to eternal life, perfect in you the image of his glory; and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you, and remain with you always. **Amen.**